From: Kent Pirkle
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/23/02 5:01pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

I believe the proposed settlement is a bad idea and will not be
effective in promoting competition in the software industry.

I have owned and used computers since 1983. I have a Bachelors of
Science in Computer Engineering Technology from Southern Polytechnic
State University and have been professionally involved in selling,
programming, and administration of computer for 14 years.

Over this time I have seen Microsoft rise from the producer of a BASIC
programming language found in most small home computers of the early
eighties, to the producer of the ubiquitous MS-DOS operating system, to
the producer of the market dominating Windows operating system. The
popularity of Microsoft software can be most attributed to the
popularity of the IBM PC platform. In many ways this platform was not
the most technically advanced of its time, but, because IBM made it an
open architecture that other companies could copy and build upon, it
soon dominated the industry. Riding on the coattails of this dominance
was Microsoft. When other operating systems of comperable capability and
price were created (such as Digital Research's DR-DOS), Microsoft used
its dominance to make its software incompatible with the alternative
operating systems.Later, when the Internet became popular, Microsoft
bundled their browser with their OS, which in itself, is not
unreasonable, but, they then used their position to threaten PC
manufacturers to not install Netscape, a competitive product. The result
of this is the current situation where the Microsoft web browser has a
vast majority of the market share, since its the only browser most users
ever see.

The danger for the future is that unless something is done to limit
Microsoft's ability to use its market dominance as a weapon to destroy
competitors, the day will come when Microsoft will be the only choice in
computing. In this world, innovation would be dead. Currently, there is
hope, just as the IBM PC open hardware platform allowed competition to
flourish in the hardware realm, so do open source technologies like the
GNU/Linux operating system, the OpenOffice office suite, and the Mozilla
web browser make the possiblity of true competition in the software
world possible with no one company controlling the market. But, there is
a great danger that these technolgies will become useless due to the
fact that Microsoft has such an overwhelming presence in the desktop
arena. The majority of documents in most businesses are stored in
proprietary Microsoft Office formats that are very difficult to reverse
engineer and are constantly changing. The Mozilla web browser is in
danger of being unable to view much of the content of the web due to
proprietary extensions such as ActiveX controls and the .NET initiative.

Linux is unable to make headway due to the fact that the two forementioned applications cannot fully interoperate with the proprietary Microsoft technologies.

What should be the remedy? Microsoft should not be broken up. Such action would be ineffective. Forcing them to open source their operating system or to port their proprietary software to other platforms would do nothing to increase competition. The remedy is simple: Microsoft must make their document formats, Application Programming Interfaces, and protocols openly available to the public. This is how the Internet flourished early on, and it is how computing can remain innovative and competitive in the future.

Thank You for the opportunity to comment,

Kent Pirkle
4740 Kelly Mill Rd
Cumming, Georgia 30040